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STATE FOR EAP/K AND INL (JOHN LYLE)

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SUBJECT: 2008-2009 ROK AND DPRK INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS
CONTROL STRATEGY REPORT (INCSR)

REF: STATE 100989

¶1. (U) Per reftel, Embassy Seoul's submission for the Republic of Korea (ROK) portion of the 2008-2009 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR) is provided in para 2. Input for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) portion of the INCSR is provided at para 3 with the understanding that information on the DPRK's narcotics-related activities is very limited.

¶2. (U) 2008-2009 INCSR input for the ROK:

¶I. Summary

Narcotics production or abuse is not a major problem in the Republic of Korea (ROK). However, reports continue to indicate that an undetermined quantity of narcotics is smuggled through South Korea en route to the United States and other countries. South Korea has become a transshipment location for drug traffickers due to the country's reputation for not having a drug abuse problem. This combined with the fact that the South Korean port of Pusan is one of the region's largest ports, makes South Korea an attractive location for illegal shipments coming from countries which are more likely to attract a contraband inspection upon arrival. The ROK is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention.

II. Status of Country

Drugs available in the ROK include methamphetamine, heroin, cocaine, marijuana, and club drugs such as LSD and Ecstasy. Methamphetamine continues to be the most widely abused drug, while marijuana remains popular as well. Heroin and cocaine are only sporadically seen in the ROK. Club drugs such as Ecstasy and LSD continue to be popular among college students. To discourage individuals from producing methamphetamine, the South Korean government controls the purchase of over-the-counter medicines containing ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, requiring customer registration for quantities greater than 720 mg (a three-day standard dose).

III. Country Actions Against Drugs 2008

Policy Initiatives. In 2008, the Korean Food and Drug Administration (KFDA) continued to implement stronger precursor chemical controls under amended legislation approved in 2005. The KFDA continued its efforts to educate companies and train its regulatory investigators on the enhanced regulations and procedures for monitoring the precursor chemical program. In addition to existing regulatory oversight procedures to track and address diversion of narcotics and psychotropic substances from medical facilities, the ROK in 2008 strengthened the Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Family Affairs' role in the treatment, protection, and study of drug-addicts. In 2008, the ROK added benzylpiperazine to the list of narcotics and gamma butyrolactone (GBL) to the list of narcotic raw materials.

Law Enforcement Efforts. In the first ten months of 2008, South Korean authorities arrested 8,283 individuals for narcotic violations of which 6,120 individuals were arrested for psychotropic substance use and 814 persons for marijuana use. ROK authorities seized 17.2 kg of methamphetamine. Ecstasy seizures decreased from 18,151 tablets (for the first nine months of 2007) to 273. South Korean authorities seized 65.4 kg of marijuana, which is an increase from the 19.6 kg seized during the first nine months of 2007. (NOTE: Total figures for 2008 are not available.) South Koreans generally do not use heroin; and cocaine is used only sporadically, with no indication of its use increasing.

Corruption. There were no reports of corruption involving narcotics law enforcement in the ROK in 2008. As a matter of government policy, the ROK does not encourage or facilitate illicit production or distribution of narcotic or psychotropic or other controlled substances, or the laundering of proceeds from illegal drug transactions.

Agreements and Treaties. South Korea has extradition treaties with 23 countries and mutual legal assistance treaties in force with 18 countries, including the United States. South Korea is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention, the 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances, and the 1961 UN Single Convention, as amended by its 1972 Protocol. South Korea has signed, but has not yet ratified, the UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime and the UN Convention against Corruption. Korean authorities exchange information with international counter narcotics agencies such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the International Criminal Police Organization

(INTERPOL), and have placed Korean National Police and/or Korea Customs Service attaches in Thailand, Japan, Hong Kong, China, and the United States.

Cultivation/Production. Legal marijuana and hemp growth is licensed by local Health Departments. The hemp is used to produce fiber for traditional hand-made ceremonial funeral clothing. Every year, each District Prosecutor's Office, in conjunction with local governments, conducts surveillance into suspected illicit marijuana growing areas during planting or harvesting time periods to limit possible illicit diversion. Opium poppy production is illegal in South Korea, although poppy continues to be grown in Kyonggi Province where farmers have traditionally used the harvested plants as a folk medicine to treat sick pigs and cows. Opium is not normally processed from these plants for human consumption. Korean authorities continue surveillance of opium poppy-growing areas. Statistics for marijuana and poppy plant seizures during 2008 were unavailable for the report.

Drug Flow/Transit. Few narcotic drugs originate in South Korea. The exportation of narcotic substances is illegal under South Korean law, and none are known to be exported. However, the ROK does produce and export the precursor chemicals acetone, toluene, and sulfuric acid. Transshipment through South Korea's ports remains a serious problem. ROK authorities recognize South Korea's vulnerability as a transshipment nexus and have undertaken greater efforts to educate shipping companies of the risk. ROK authorities, ability to directly intercept the suspected transshipment of narcotics and precursor chemicals has been limited by the fact that the vast majority of the shipping containers never enter ROK territory. Nonetheless, the ROK continued its international cooperation efforts to monitor and investigate transshipment cases. Redoubled efforts by the Korean Customs Service (KCS) have resulted in increased seizures of methamphetamine and marijuana (12.8 kg and 13.9 kg respectively in the first ten months of 2008) transported by arriving passengers and through postal services at South Korea's ports of entry. Most methamphetamine smuggled into South Korea comes from China. A majority of the LSD and Ecstasy used in South Korea has been identified as coming from North America or Europe. People living in metropolitan areas are known to use marijuana originating in South Africa

and Nigeria, whereas those living in rural areas appear to obtain their marijuana from locally produced crops. ROK authorities also report increased instances of marijuana use among the foreign population in South Korea in recent years, a trend that is most likely the result of increased law enforcement efforts targeting this segment of the population.

IV. U.S. Policy Initiatives and Programs

Policy Initiatives and Programs. The U.S. Embassy's Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Seoul Country Office and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials work closely with ROK narcotics law enforcement authorities. Both the DEA and ICE consider their working relationships to be excellent.

Bilateral Cooperation. The DEA Seoul Country Office has focused its efforts on international drug interdiction, seizures of funds and assets related to illicit narcotics trafficking (in collaboration with ICE), and the diversion of precursor chemicals in South Korea and in the Far East region. In 2008, the DEA Seoul Country Office organized, coordinated, and hosted a one-week training seminar on Airport Interdiction. This training was co-hosted by the Korean Customs Service (KCS). The DEA Seoul Country Office continues to share intelligence regarding the importation of precursor chemicals into South Korea from the United States and other Asian countries with the KFDA, KCS, the Korean Supreme Prosecutors Office (KSPO), and the Korean National Intelligence Service (KNIS). DEA also works closely with the KSPO and KCS in their activities to monitor airport and drug transshipment methods and trends, including the use of international mail by drug traffickers.

The Road Ahead. ROK authorities have expressed concern that the popularity of South Korea as a transshipment nexus may lead to greater volume of drugs entering Korean markets. Korean authorities fear increased accessibility and lower prices could stimulate domestic drug use in the future. South Korean authorities also indicate a growing concern about the importation of narcotics, psychotropic drugs, and illegal medicines purchased via the internet, predominately from web sites maintained in the United States. In response, Korean authorities established Memorandum of Understanding with a number of Korean internet portal sites to allow the KNPA to track and intercept such purchases. Statistics for intercepted internet-based drug purchases during 2008 is

unavailable. The South Korean government is currently seeking further international cooperation to better navigate the legal complexities surrounding the prosecution of transnational cyber crimes. The DEA Seoul Country Office will continue its extensive training, mentoring, and operational cooperation with ROK authorities.

13. (U) 2008-2009 INCSR input for the DPRK:

1. Summary

There have been no instances of drug trafficking in the Democratic People's Republic of (North) Korea (DPRK) suggestive of state-directed trafficking for six years. It seems possible that the DPRK has curtailed trafficking in narcotic drugs involving its personnel and state assets. However, there is insufficient evidence to say for certain that state-sponsored trafficking has stopped at this time. Still, small-scale trafficking along the DPRK-China border continues. The DPRK is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention.

II. Status of Country

There were no confirmed instances of large-scale drug trafficking involving the DPRK or its nationals during 2008. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the small-scale trafficking and drug abuse in the DPRK itself and along its border with China continue. The China-DPRK border region is the only area in the world where there are continuing reports of drug

trafficking involving DPRK nationals. Most reports indicate small-scale trafficking by individual North Koreans who cross the border into China. In some cases there are reports of slightly larger-scale trafficking by locally prominent individuals living along the border who misuse their modest positions of local influence in the ruling party to traffic in methamphetamine. Also, there are indications that some foreign nationals from Japan and South Korea might travel to this area to purchase the stimulant drugs available there.

III. Country Actions Against Drugs in 2008

Law Enforcement Efforts. Most of the reports about drug trafficking along the China-DPRK border emerge only after the individuals involved are apprehended. There is no evidence of a central role for the DPRK state institutions in organizing the trafficking, as had emerged regularly in the past, especially in Japan during the mid- to late nineties, and continuing until the 2003 incident in Australia involving the "Pong Su," a DPRK cargo vessel involved with the delivery and seizure of a large quantity of heroin. It appears that both China and the DPRK try to discourage such trafficking through law enforcement efforts and information campaigns on both sides of the border. However an atmosphere of lawlessness remains along this border because individuals who wish to leave the DPRK can apparently do so through payments to guides.

Despite the absence of any large-scale narcotics trafficking incidents involving the state, examples of non-narcotics-related acts of criminality suggests that DPRK-tolerance for criminal behavior may exist on a larger, organized scale. Press, industry and law enforcement reporting of DPRK links to large-scale counterfeit cigarette trafficking in the North Korean Export Processing Zone at Rajiin (or Najin) does not specify the extent to which DPRK authorities are complicit in this illegal activity, although it is all but certain that they are aware of it.

Agreements and Treaties. The DPRK is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention, the 1961 UN Single Convention and the 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances.

Cultivation/Production. The Department has no evidence to support a finding that state trafficking has stopped, and no clear evidence it is continuing. Consequently, there is no clear answer as to whether the DPRK has abandoned its involvement in drug trafficking. But the absence of any seizures linked to DPRK state institutions in almost six years, after a period in which such seizures involving very large quantities of drugs occurred regularly, does suggest, at least, considerably less state trafficking, and perhaps a complete end to it. On the other hand, the continuing large-scale traffic in counterfeit cigarettes from DPRK territory suggests, at the least, that enforcement against organized criminality is lax, or that a lucrative counterfeit cigarette trade has replaced a riskier drug trafficking business as a generator of revenue for the DPRK state.

IV. U.S. Initiatives and Programs

The Department is of the view that it is likely, but not certain, that the North Korean government has sponsored criminal activities in the past, including narcotics production and trafficking, but notes that there has been no evidence for almost six years that it continues to traffic in narcotics.

STEPHENS